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ABSTRACT

Syntactic synonymy enables the speaker to use syntactic devices to say the same thing in a number of different ways. It is based on three criteria: (1) similarity of semantic content, (2) certain syntactic similarity between the components of the synonymous structures, and (3) differences in surface structures. The third criterion separates synonymous structures from mere sentence variants. Stylistic analyses can explain why the choice of a particular syntactic structure takes place, given that meanings are the same. For example, "for-to" complementation may be preferred over "that" complementation when the speaker wishes to accentuate the beneficiary of an action expressed in a main clause and to imply shades of meaning that "that"-clauses must state explicitly. Sentences with "for-to" complementation also appear in highly emotional speech, in rhetorical questions, and in the functions of intensifying, enumerating, and optimalising of communication. Usage of "for-to" is stylistically constrained when certain syntactic conditions exist, such as the occurrence of an infinitival verb-phrase following a clause complement predicate. Such choice of structures makes language more expressive, helps to avoid monotony, and adds variety. (PJM)

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SYNONYMOUS STRUCTURES AS ALTERNATIVE FORMS OF EXPRESSION

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I. Syntactic Synonyms and Criteria of Their Definition.

The relation between form and meaning has long been one of the basic questions of linguistic theory. It was noticed that synonymy arises not only from the existence of more than one word to a meaning: a language makes explicit provision of syntactic devices to enable the speaker to say the same (or nearly the same) thing in a number of ways.

By contrast with lexical synonymy, syntactic synonymy deals with syntactic means of conveying a certain semantic content. In this respect the problem of the structure of syntactic synonyms, i.e. the constituent elements of a syntactic form and the syntactic relations between them, - is of considerable importance. Assuming that syntactic synonyms convey similar semantic content, we maintain that structural variety predetermines the existence of different ways of expressing the same content. There should, however, be certain structural similarity between the components of synonymous syntactic forms for the structures to be comparable: sentences with a one-word complement, on the one hand, and a clause-complement, on the other hand, can hardly be treated as syntactic synonyms.[1]

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[1] Compare: "They felt happy about the victory" → "They felt happy when they gained a victory"; "he was disgusted by the story" → "he was disgusted by what he heard".
R. Freidin (1971) finds "near paraphrase relationship" between such sentences as "John bought the book from Jack" → "Jack sold the book to John". N. Chomsky (1965) mentioned similar sentences as obviously related in meaning. This is, to our mind, a crucial point: "the near paraphrase relationship" is based only on the semantics of the corresponding predicates.

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The definition of syntactic synonyms should, to our mind, be based on the following criteria:

a. similarity of semantic content;

b, certain syntactic similarity between the elements of the structures;

c. difference in their surface structure.

The first criterion justifies the term "synonymy" which implies basic similarity of meaning between utterances.

The criterion of syntactic similarity makes the units comparable with regard to their components and the syntactic relations between them.

The criterion of structural difference is necessary to distinguish between synonyms, varients and identity-sentences.[2]

II. Syntactic Synonyms as Investigated by Grammarians and Stylists.

Should syntactic synonyms be the object of grammatical or stylistic analysis? The difficulty of the problem is self-evident: it is not easy to draw the line of demarkation between grammar and stylistics in syntax.

Some linguists claim that grammatical analysis is "rough" and dealing with basic meanings only, while stylistic analysis is more "subtle" since it emphasizes shades of meaning.

We are of the opinion that there is ample justification for both approaches provided the right question is posed. In the case of grammatical analysis the question is WHAT is expressed and HOW it is

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[2] The following sentences could serve as examples:
"It is necessary for him to come" → "It is necessary that he should come;
"I hate it for John to be more popular than me" → "I hate John to be more popular than me";
"He is excellent at algebra" → "He is excellent in algebra".

expressed.In the case of stylistic analysis the question is WHY it is expressed this way.In other words,the problem is that of the internal structure of a number of similar utterances versus the problem of selecting the most effective way of expressing a given meaning.The concept of syntactic synonyms is defined identically in grammar and in stylistics but the aim and means of investigation are different.Stylistic peculiarities of syntactic synonyms should be investigated only after certain syntactic forms are defined as synonymous on the basis of their meaning and syntactic structure.

III.Transformational Alternatives as Different Expressions of Similar Content.

Describing "styles within grammar",N.Enkvist(1973) points out that the assignation of stylistically marked or unmarked status to grammatical features "would focus attention on the contextually most neutral,most widespread and,in this sense,basic features of the language".

Stylistic choice involves grammatically optional selection.There can be no question of style unless the speaker or writer has the possibility of choosing between alternative forms of expression. As noted by S.Ullman(1973),"synonymy,in the widest usage of the word, lies at the root of the whole problem of style".In order not to bore the reader with their monotony,sentences should vary in their form and structure.

We shall illustrate the point by comparing sentences with for-infinitival and that-clause complements.

1)"It would be better for her to be engaged to me because I respect her and wouldn't take advantage of her"(Freeman,G.,The Marriage Machine,p.64)

2)"It was best that Mrs.Bassington should know the truth" (A.Christie, Cards on the Table,p.146)

The for NP of the infinitival complement accentuates the "beneficiary" of the action denoted by the matrix predicate.In sentence 1)the for NP explicitly names the person from whose point of view the action is evaluated as having a positive effect,whereas in sentence 2)the complement just names the action evaluated by the matrix clause. Compare also:

3)"It was the final degradation for her to think of Ashley reduced to the state of these other soldiers".(M.Mitchell,Gone With the Wind,p.418)

4)It was atrocious that some of the best people have been arrested.

A for-infinitival complement implicitly expresses certain shades of meaning which a subordinate clause expresses explicitly.

Compare:

5)Is it possible for him to disregard others?

6)Is it possible that he can disregard others?

7)Is it possible that he may disregard others?

8)Is it possible that he should disregard others?

Sentence 6)expresses the person's physical or mental ability to carry out the action.In sentence 7)the probability of the action is emphasized.Sentence 8) is the most neutral one from the point of view of modality.

Compare also:

9)I hoped for this to happen.

10)I hoped you would find her.

11)I hoped you might find her.

12)(It would be too much of a good thing) to hope he should come first.

Sentence 10) has an explicit future reference:the would + V form of the complement clause follows a past tense matrix predicate.

Sentence 11) emphasizes the probability of the action. Sentence 12) by virtue of would + V in the matrix clause and should + V in the complement clause presents the action as an unreal supposition. Thus, such shades of meaning as probability, supposition, physical or mental ability, etc. which might be implicit in a sentence with a for-infinitival complement (supported by a wider context) are explicitly expressed in a sentence with a clausal complement where the range of predicate forms is wide.

IV. Stylistic Usage of Synonymous Sentences.

Linguists investigating the stylistic usage of sentences with infinitival complements usually limit themselves to the statement that such syntactic forms are used in written rather than in spoken language.

There is plenty linguistic evidence, however, to prove that sentences with for-infinitival complements are a widely used means of expressiveness chosen by different writers

a. as a stylistically neutral form of narration;

b. in emotionally coloured dialogic speech;

c. in rhetorical questions.

The action denoted by the for-infinitival complement may get a certain evaluation through the predicative in the matrix clause. This evaluation may be positive, negative, neutral or emotionally coloured, it may express the speaker's intention to carry out an action or his dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs:

13) It is unwise for her to do it.

14) It is nice for her to have it.

15) He is impatient for the thing to happen.

16) It is disgraceful for you to go there.

Sentences with for-infinitival complements appear in highly

emotional speech,in exclamatory sentences,when the speaker is at the peak of emotional excitement:

17)"Please,God,keep me from telephoning him...Please,God.I don't see what pride has to do with it.There is such a little thing for me to be bringing in pride,for me to be making such a fuss about.I may have misunderstood him.May be he said for me to call him up at five..." (D.Parker,Little Curtis,p.15)

For-infinitival complements appear in rhetorical questions.The questions may be either part of narration - when their function is to create emotional impact upon the reader,- or part of a monologue,when their function can be that of evaluation:

18)"But if,like these Africans,one believed in some kind of divine Being,wasn't it just as possible for God to exist in this empty region as in the empty spaces of the sky..." (G.Metalious,Return to Payton Place,p. 24)

In narration,sentences with for-infinitival complements are used:

a.for enumeration:

19)"It is fine for the girls to emulate you and for the boys to try to please you".(B.Kaufman,Up the Down Stair-Case,p.194)

b.as antithesis:

20)"It was no more inconsistent for Lockwoods to be Lutherans than for the important German-name brewers and meat packers to belong to Trinity Church in Gibbsville" (J.O'Hara ,Lockwood Concern,p.136).

c.in the stylistic function of intensification:

21)"To wait...for one or other of their nieces or nephews to come and cheer him up...for the doctor to come about

Hester's inclination to wake up early..."(J.Galsworthy,The Man of Property,p.276)

Sentences with for-infinitival complements are often used in publicistic style where clarity,brevity,variety are required and where preference is therefore given to a closer construction. Nominality gives another advantage to the writer:to the extent that he can avoid finite verbs,he can avoid commitment to the tense.Sentences with infinitival complements perfectly correspond to the requirements of publicistic style:informational brevity of communication,publicistic passion and emotionality.

Although sentences with clausal complements are more varied and flexible forms of expression,sentences with infinitival complements have the advantage of precision,conciseness,objectivity of expression.

V.Stylistic Constraints on the Selection of Syntactic Synonyms.

The usage of a syntactic structure may to a certain extent be constrained by stylistic factors.

Material selected in the process of our investigation illustrates the following stylistic factors predetermining the choice of synonymous structures[3].

1.An infinitival VP follows the clause-complement predicate: transformation into an infinitival complement would result in

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[3]By "stylistic constraints" we mean those stylistic factors which make the transformation of a clause-complement into an infinitival complement undesirable.

two successive infinitives which is stylistically undesirable:

22)It is amazing that a Labour Government should decide to maintain statutory controls over wages(...for a Labour Government to decide to maintain...).

2.Two or more "for NP toV " structures in succession make the sentence heavy. It is a deviation from the literary norm:there is a tendency to eliminate repetition(although in certain cases the choice of structurally similar sentences is desirable for the sake of emphasis)

23)For men who claim not to sleep it is important for them not to be caught asleep,as if it were some kind of honour for them to go around with bags under their eyes".(R.Crichton,The Secret of Santa Vittoria,p.16).

24)But I want you to understand that I came to look after your house.I refuse to treat you as my guardian or for you to call me your adopted daughter".(D.Du Maurier,The Loving Spirit,p.279).

3.The NP of the clause-complement is followed by a "for NP" or by a " toV":transformation into a for-infinitival complement might cause ambiguity:

25) It is outrageous that your repeated requests for information should be disregarded.(...for your repeated requests for information to be disregarded)

26)It is important that the proposal to increase the price of services should be noted.(...for the proposals to increase the price of services to be noted).

4.There is an extended attributive clause following the NP of the clause-complement:transformation into a for-infinitival complement

would produce a sentence virtually impossible to read with the right intonation and rhythm:

27)"And the more he mused the more monstrous it seemed that the great and rich family who all his own life and all his father's and grandfather's lives long had been a power and a glory in the town were now fallen and scattered". (P.Buck,The Good Earth,p.148)

5.The clause-complement predicate is modified by intensifying adverbs:the transformation into an infinitival complement would result in the usage of the so called "split infinitive" which is not desirable stylistically:

28)"It was inconceivable that a woman who had been married to him could ever think seriously of doing anything other than mourn his loss".(G.Metalious,The Peyton Place,p.297).

The mentioned stylistic factors are mostly optional:without interfering with the grammaticality of the sentence,they make it more preferable stylistically.

Stylists have repeatedly pointed out that even if two utterances convey approximately the same information,but are different in their syntactic structure,they can be said to differ in style. From the point of view of stylistic variation the cases of the so called "mixed usage" - when both types of complements are part of one syntactic structure - present a considerable interest:

29)"Of course it is a very good thing for a man to be a gentleman but it's better that he should be competent and hard-working".(Short Story Masterpieces,p.314).

30)"I'd rather you didn't give me a birthday present at all than for you to stop at one of those awful

places where they bring out a bottle of whiskey for men like you...".(E.Caldwell,Tobacco Road,p.28).

Such shifts of structure make the language much more expressive, help to avoid monotony and add variety.

Thus,the availability of syntactic synonyms opens up certain possibilities and may have considerable stylistic consequences. There is a great need of thorough collection of data from a wide range of written and spoken language concerning the array of constraints on the choice of synonymous sentences.

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